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SOME EDMONTON FORTS, THEIR FACTORS AND THE "BIG HOUSE"

The Observer presents herewith a historical review by Mr. Ernest Brown of Vegreville, of the early days of the district of which Edmonton is now the chief centre.

MIS-STATEMENTS

So many inaccuracies have been written about the establishment of the early forts in the vicinity of what is now the city of Edmonton, and repeated so many different ways, that were it not for the known facts of such dates as the amalgamation of the N.W. Co. with the Hudson's Bay Co. being so glaringly mis-stated we would be inclined to accept the statements as authentic. It is only of late years, however, that we have been able to get any real information that is at all satisfying to the searcher after historical truths.

MACDONALD OF GARTH AND HUGHES BUILT FORT AUGUSTUS 1791

The best of these are the published diary and the unpublished notes of John Macdonald, better known as Macdonald of Garth, which is now in possession of his grandson, de Lery Macdonald, Seigneur of Rigaud and St. Eustache, Quebec.

From notes, we gather, on June 15th, 1791, he left Lachine with Simon McTavish, arriving at Cumberland Lake, there they were joined by Alexander MacKenzie. On page 22 he says,--"I was ordered with Hughes about two hundred

miles farther up to commence another fort which we named Fort Augustus (the foot note says Edmonton)." He goes on to say: "We had here besides the Hudson's Bay Co., whose fort was within musket shot of ours, the opposition on the other side of us of the new concern, which had assumed powerful shape, under the name of the X.Y. Co."

Lord Selkirk definitely puts the date of the founding of the X.Y.Co. as 1798, seven years later.

It is supposed that the name "Augustus" given to the fort, was in honor of a small hamlet near his home in Perthshire; others say it was after Prince Frederick Augustus, the Prince of Wales at that time. Macdonald left the Northwest in 1816, and settled at Grays Creek in Glengarry.

ANOTHER STATEMENT--BUILT BY ANGUS SHAW AND DUNCAN MCGILLIVARY

Other statements which have more than a semblance of truth are that, old Fort Augustus was built in 1792-4 on a site that is now known as Section 15, Township 55, Range 22, west of the Fourth Meridian, being near the mouth of the Sturgeon River, where it joins the Saskatchewan River, about one and one-half miles from Fort Saskatchewan, the builders being Angus Shaw and Duncan McGillivary. (McG. left in 1803 with Thompson, died 1807, P.P. 97 N.W. Co).

HENRY CONCURS

Alexander Henry says--"On September 13th, 1808, he passed Fort Vermilion, he then made a trip to Fort Augustus, which had been built for the North West Co. by Angus

Shaw in 1792, and been abandoned since 1808.

AN EARLIER FORT AUGUSTUS

He also passed Old Fort Augustus on the north side of the "Sascatchiwaine". This tells us of the existence of a Fort Augustus previous to 1792, and is probably one of the forts referred to further on in this article, when, on his travels of 1776 he visited Fort des Praries and "found four traders." From this it would be safe to assume a much earlier date than the one first given herein by Macdonald of Garth as 1791. Note, Pond had been through the country as early as 1768, and the fort was possibly Fort aux Trembles, mentioned by Alexander Henry. In 1785 Peter Pangman was in charge of Fort des Praries.

FORT EDMONTON

Three years later (1795) Fort Edmonton was built by George Sutherland for the Hudson's Bay Co. and was the Company's most westerly post until Rocky Mountain House post was built in 1799.

There seems little doubt, however, as recorded by Macdonald of Garth, that the X.Y. Co. had a post at or near the same place at a later date.

PETER POND 1776

On a map (in the Canadian Archives) and on the back of the map, which is named "Travels of Capt. Peter Pond," is shown Fort No. 12, and referred to as "Fort des Prairie" with a note "Wintered here 2 years with 160 men, 1776-1777." Pond says he came out of Indian Country last time in 1788. The map and abstract is authenticiated by Yale University

Library. (Sir Alex. Mackenzie in the General History of Fur Trade, published in London in 1801 says,--that Fort Chipewyan was established by Pond in 1788).

WHY STURGEON FORTS WERE ABANDONED

Probably on account of the difficulty of reaching the buffalo country to the south from this point, (Fort Saskatchewan), it would appear that the posts were abandoned in 1807 for ones farther up the river at what is now Edmonton, the old forts being burned down by the Indians under (Chief?) Old White Swan or Gray Swan in 1809. Thompson says when he passed in 1810 the forts were in ruins.

EDMONTON'S NAME

Some historians have it that the fort (N.W. Fort?) at Edmonton was only occupied for three years, then evacuated and reoccupied in 1819. The name "Edmonton" appears to have been given by Factor George Sutherland, in honor of, or on the suggestion of John Prudens, an Englishman--his clerk, who is said to have come from the town of the same name in the south of England near London. If this is correct then the name Edmonton must have applied to the fort from the time of its erection in 1795. Other writers claim the name was not applied until after amalgamation of the two companies in 1821. Dr. (Sir John) Richardson speaks of the Crees inhabiting the country around Fort Augustus in 1819.

FACTOR ROWAN

When Sutherland left is not known, but Alex. Ross in passing through in 1825 says John Rowan was factor. (Note: the name is variously spelled Rowand, Rouan, Rouen, Rowland, but the one that persists and which we will use is the one given by Alex. Ross, i.e. John Rowan), and that he had been in charge for a quarter of a century. This would take us back to 1800, or from six to eight years after the forts were built at the junction of the Sturgeon River with the Saskatchewan River, and seven years abefore the forts were moved to the later (Edmonton) location. O.O. Report 7, reads in part--Fort Augustus, 26th. January, 1821,--Mr. Rowand wintered at Rocky Mountain House. We have no means of verifying these dates or reconciling the statements of the different builders and factors at this early stage of occupancy, therefore we will take the starting point of Towan's occupancy as commencing in 1800.

To what date Rowan remained in charge at this Fort is uncertain one writer, Joseph McDonald (born 1835) guile and pathfinder for Palliser, says when he arrived at Fort Edmonton in 1855 with John Rowand, Jr., to round up cattle for the father, John Rowand, Sr. (late factor at Edmonton). "Swanson was in charge at Edmonton for a few years." Later he says he wintered at Edmonton in 1858 with Palliser; another account says Palliser passed through Edmonton in 1857, and Chief Factor Christie was in command. Christie is reported by different writers as being in

charge at Edmonton in 1856-1858, 1864-5. The record which perhaps seems a little more connected is the statement by John Sinclair, also born in 1835, and an Edmonton old-timer, who was the son of Chief Factor William Sinclair, says his father was chief factor at Edmonton for three years (died 1884, aged 75 years.) He was followed by his son-in-law, William Christie, (brother-in-law to John Sinclair--the narrator). Four years later Christie was replaced by Chief Factor Swanson, who after one year, asked and received a transfer east. He was succeeded by Chief Factor Richard Hardisty. This gives us only a period of eight years between Rowan quitting and Hardisty starting.

CHIEF FACTOR HARDISTY

Hardisty started between 1868 and 1870. Rowan was here in 1800--This would make him nearly fifty years in charge. He was in Winnipeg in 1835 and possibly much earlier. The eight years would only bring us to 1863, therefore, there must either have been another chief factor between Rowan and Sinclair, or that Sinclair, Christie or Swanson returned for a second term, or their periods of command were longer than stated by our revered old timer John Sinclair, who unfortunately tives us no dates to go by.

An Edmonton old-timer and employee of the Company, Mr. Harrison Young, says when he arrived in Edmonton in October 1870, W.G. Christie was the factor at Edmonton and Hardisty in charge of Rocky Mountain House; on the

other hand, Mrs. Graham, daughter of Factor Hardisty, says: "I came to Fort Edmonton in 1868 at the age of six months, my father was appointed to command at the post." The reader can accept which statement he or she pleases, that of the man, sure even of the month he arrived and impressed with everything he saw and heard; or the lady who surely should know her own age. So as the date is not a vitally important one, may we be permitted to "split the difference" and set the date of Christie's departure at 1869.

Chief Factor Richard Hardisty (Brother-in-law to Lord Strathcona), was appointed to the Calgary command in 1883-5, and died in 1889. As far as our information goes, factor Livock was appointed to succeed Hardisty, the fur trade being largely handled from the North department of the Company at Edmonton, or packed and shipped direct from Athabasca Landing.

We therefore have the factors in charge at Edmonton, John Rowan from 1800 to 1825 or later; Swanson and Sinclair dates not known; Christie from 1856 or earlier to 1869, followed by Chief Factor Hardisty to 1885, with Factor Livock to the end.

ROWAN MOST AGGRESSIVE FACTOR

Of the several factors Rowan appears to have been the most aggressive. At a lecture given before the Historical Society of Alberta some years ago by the Hon. Frank Oliver, who arrived in Edmonton in 1876, and who was the proprietor and editor of Edmonton's first news-

paper had this to say of this factor: "Rowan or Rowland, Chief Factor of N.W. Co. at Edmonton, who, it is stated has numerous descendants now living in Winnipeg, is reported to have kept hired bullies to back him up in his orders. There were no North-West Mounted Police at that time and no government, except that of the Chief Factor. To the Government in England it took two years.

HIS DEATH

While the Hudson's Bay Co. had an enviable record in handling the Indians, Rowan of the opposition had no such record. It is stated that Rowan imprisoned his employees in a watch tower, and if a man was discovered not working, friend Rowan would shoot at him. Everything at Fort Edmonton ran promptly and well. Rowan's meeting of a war party of Blackfeet alone impressed them. The death of Rowan was tragic as may be expected. The boat brigade on its way to Winnipeg landed at Fort Pitt, a row took place between Rowan's son and other helpers, Rowan heard and undertook to see what the trouble was about, he had his hand on the door and fell dead from heart failure."

MANY FORTS IN VICINITY

Several writers will have it that Edmonton began with the building of Fort Augustus by James Hughes. I am not aware of the source of this information, so give the statement for what it is worth. That Edmonton has borne so many names in the past probably arises from the fact that there have been many different forts erected by the contending fur companies at varying points during the past 132 years.

HENRY DESCRIBES FORT DES PRAIRIE IN 1776

Alexander Henry in his book published 1809 says: "I left Cumberland House and wintered at Beaver Lake, Cadotte going up the Sascatchiwaine to Fort des Prairies. I left the post at Beaver River on my return to Cumberland House on New Year's Day 1776, and started for Fort des Prairies by way of the great river, the Pasquayah or Sascatchiwaine, sometimes called the Kejeechewon or Shascutchiwan. I remained at Fort des Prairies until March 22nd, 1776. Fort des Prairies is built on the margin of the Sascatchiwaine which river is here two hundred yards across and flows at a depth of thirty feet below the level of its banks. The fort has an area of about an acre, which is enclosed by a good stockade though formed only of poplar or aspen wood, (here a foot note says--"this fort or one which occupied a contiguous site, was formerly known by the name of Fort aux Trembles). The fort has two gates, which are carefully shut every evening, and has usually from fifty to eighty men for its defense." Henry further states: "Four different interests were struggling for the Indian trade of the Sascatchiwaine." Note. (sic) this is 1776 and the first organization of the North West Co. did not take place until 1779, three years later,--the X.Y. Co. 22 years later.

PROBABLY OUR OLDEST RECORD

This would appear to be some very real information, it is copied out of a very rare original edition of "Henry's Travels," published in Montreal, October 20th, 1809. It

also makes one speculate as to who the four traders then established could be, no doubt, one was the Hudson's Bay Co; one Peter Pond, but who the other two were it is hard to say.

If space permitted it would be interesting to follow Henry in his description of the articles given in trade for the various skins: guns, blankets, powder, tobacco, beads, etc. He tells us the quantity of furs traded were very large.

2000 INDIANS; 1000 DOGS

He told us previously that the Indians whom he accompanied to the fort and in whose village he had been staying, consisted of over two hundred tents, each tent containing two to four families; there were also well over one thousand dogs.

LINE OF MARCH MANY MILES IN LENGTH

The line of march exceeded three miles in length, over five hundred dogs were drawing loads. On the way they called at another village, whose inhabitants joined them on the march. "The line of march was now so far extended that those in the rear could not descry those in front." Oh no! this large number did not visit the fort, Henry says the practice was to camp for the three or four days necessary to do the trading, about one-half mile from the fort and only a few of them to go to trade the fur. From this it will be seen that twenty to thirty Indians arriving in one day would represent a very large number of Indians. J.B. Tyrell in his "Across the Sub-Arctic" says he has seen "beaver skins stacked in cocks like hay in a meadow."